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A Lott of Work to Do at DHA

By Robert Wilonsky

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Really, we're gonna have to get a new picture of Ann Lott at this rate. Nonetheless, here we go again...

A few final words about the resignation of Dallas Housing Authority board chairman Guy Brignon, who submitted his adios yesterday to the mayor who appointed him. Actually, this isn't so much about Brignon as it is DHA's CEO and president, Ann Lott, because now that her enemy's been vanquished -- or at least fell on his own sword -- she'll have no one to blame should there continue to be any turmoil or problems of any kind at the Dallas Housing Authority. From here on out, it should be smooth sailing...right? *Right.*

Lott, whose contract expires in March, doesn't have an extension yet. After the furor erupted on December 5 over her surprise ouster, Mayor Laura Miller intervened -- bringing with her U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Assistant Secretary Orlando Cabrera. They spent much of early December hammering out a deal involving Lott's new contract (sources say the extension was for a year, not three, but better than than a pink slip). They told her to hire a new chief financial officer who could better balance the books and account for every last penny. There was also talk of putting in place a long-range plan for the agency, a 10-year forecast. Everyone felt progress had been made. Everyone felt the peace had been brokered. Egypt, give Israel a hug.

Then it all kinda just fell apart. More arguing, more sniping, more allegations. It got ugly. Was gonna get uglier. Finally, the mayor had enough.

"I was concerned about Little Mexico," Mayor Miller told Unfair Park last night. "I was concerned about starting a nonprofit for home ownership, which is against HUD regulations. But I was most

concerned about how, for the last two years, the staff hasn't been able to tell the board how much money it has or how much money it's spending at any given moment. The board would ask a question, and the staff would always say, 'We'll have to get back to you later.'"

Within the last year, DHA has hired a handful of certified public accountants and a CFO. That, as far as the board and the mayor and even D.C. is concerned, is a beginning but only a beginning. But there need to be other changes, they insist. A new CFO keeps coming up in conversations with various sources outside the DHA. And they all use the same word to describe what they say is truly needed at the agency: "transparency."

"And I have every expectation Ann Lott will fix everything," the mayor says. "If she does, she should have a rosy future with the Dallas Housing Authority."

If nothing else, she can't claim Guy Brignon's getting in her way. --Robert Wilonsky

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